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**KIEFT'S WAR AND TRIBUTARY POLITICS IN EASTERN WOODLAND
COLONIAL SOCIETY**

HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

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KIEFT'S WAR AND TRIBUTARY POLITICS IN EASTERN WOODLAND COLONIAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT: From the earliest interactions between the Dutch and native groups in the New World, cultural differences regarding the ideas of property and governmental jurisdiction created societal conflict. When native tribes in the vicinity of New Netherland began to consolidate into traditional political alliances based on tribute and protection during the mid-1630s, thereby undercutting theoretical European dominance in New Netherland and New England, the English and Dutch both aggressively used the native system by forcing tributary status on local tribes through armed conflict, ritualized violence, and the use of tribal extermination as symbols of power. For the Dutch, this movement was known as Kieft's War.

Kieft's War and Tributary Politics in Eastern Woodland Colonial Society

Introduction

It was late winter, 1643, and Roger Williams had come to New Amsterdam for the same reason that many would later flock to what was to become New York City; that is, he was a refugee. The Puritan elite had become displeased with him, and at the time he was not welcome in the port of Boston. However, unlike the poor, huddled masses that would one day make the long journey across the Atlantic with New York as their destination, Williams was attempting to gain passage back to Europe. Since the powers in Boston would not allow him to embark, he ventured down to New England's Dutch counterpart to the south, New Netherland. The scene he witnessed unfolding around him as he waited in the harbor of New Amsterdam for passage back to the Old World shocked him:

Mine eyes did see y^t first breaking forth of y^e Indian War, w^{ch} y^e Dutch begun (upon y^e slaughter of some Dutch by y^e Indians) & they questioned not to finish it in a few dayes..., y^e Name of Peace... was foolish & odious to them But before we waighed Anchor their Bowries were in Flames Dutch & Eng were slaine mine Eyes saw their flames at their Townes end & y^e Flights & Hurries of Men, Women & Children, the present Remoovall of all y^t Could for Holland & after... mutual slaughters of Dutch, English & Indians... y^e Dutch were forced... to make up a most unworthy & dishonorable peace with y^e Indians.¹

To Williams, such a calamity was appalling, but not unthinkable. He was acutely aware of the power of the natives who at once outnumbered and lived in close proximity to both Dutch and English colonists in the New World. Tribes could affect political and cultural

¹ Roger Williams, "Letter from Roger Williams, President of Providence Colony, 1654", *Plymouth Colony Records, Vol 10*, (Massachusetts Hist. Society, 1880), 440. The letter was written to the authorities in Massachusetts to implore them to continue to treat peacefully with the Indians and to attempt to convert them to Christianity.

interaction between themselves and colonists, as well as between colonial groups. Upon founding his colony at Providence, he feared the encroachment of Plymouth jurisdiction on the grounds that his northern neighbor also held authority over local Wampanoags. It was Williams who warned Massachusetts authorities about a growing alliance between the powerful Mohawks of upstate New York and the nearly as strong Narragansetts of southern New England. Most importantly, it was Williams who, at the behest of New England authorities, brokered alliances with the same powerful Narragansetts, and brought the tribe into both the Pequot War and King Philip's War on the English side.²

The scene which Roger Williams so vividly depicted was a part of what is today known as Kieft's War, a complicated conflict with an overly simplistic name. Like Williams, many historians have looked at the conflict as merely a series of attacks and reprisals that ultimately resulted in destruction for Dutch and natives alike. These historians are content, like Williams, to explain the war without ever leaving New Netherland; it was no more than provincial hostilities brought on by, for example, increases in Dutch population or the killing of a few traders by local Algonquin tribesmen. Although these were certainly factors in creating tension, and eventually hostility between the two sides of the conflict, to truly understand events within New Netherland, one must look at a number of outside events and groups that exerted pressure within the Dutch realm. The Iroquois, for one, of central to western New York, dramatically changed the socio-political landscape of the area when they began their military expansion and "mourning wars" a few years before Kieft's War.³ Not only did they begin to exert previously unseen influence on the southern Algonquin tribes in and

² James D. Drake, King Philip's War, Civil War in New England 1675-1676 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 33-34, 75-76.

³ David R. Snow, The Iroquois, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 113-114.

around New Amsterdam, but they forced the Dutch to rethink their Indian policy, and redraw the map of where their efforts and influence would bear the greatest fruit. The English to the North also contributed with their war against the Pequots and entreaties with the Mohawks.

Along with Kieft's War, Roger Williams spoke of the Pequot War in his letter, inviting both comparison and connection. The two wars, after all, were only three years apart, took on similar attributes, and even had some similar key figures (i.e., Captain John Underhill, Miantonomo of the Narragansetts, etc.). More importantly, the outcome of the war drastically changed the interactions between local Indians and their white counterparts. The Pequot War effectively wiped one of the more powerful Algonquin tribes off the map. The Pequots not only held substantial territory bordering New Netherland, but held most of the Long Island Algonquins in tribute.

As one steps back, outside of New Netherland, a new picture of the events depicted in Roger Williams' account begins to form. New England tribes, emboldened by the collapse of the Pequots, one of their rival nations, and the Iroquois to the north, fresh off of their victories over neighboring tribes, began to exert pressure on the Algonquin tribes local to New Netherland, and thus, the Dutch themselves. The Dutch, reacting to these threats, responded by attempting to turn what was once a peaceful partnership between equal groups into a patron/client relationship where the local tribes would pay tribute and subordinate themselves to the Dutch. Kieft's War was more than just border skirmishes between Dutch farmers and disgruntled natives sick of watching pigs and cattle trample their hunting grounds. More likely, it was an attempt by numerous groups to fill a newly created power vacuum, with each of these groups

believing that they had a rightful claim to temporarily independent tributaries, and the ensuing response from those tribes that were being acted upon. Since these tribes were closest in geographic proximity to the Dutch population center at New Amsterdam, the New Netherlanders had a vested interest in fighting the strongest for control of these tribes, the end result being a four-year conflict for the domination of natives within the region of southern New Netherland.

Kieft's War took place between 1641 and 1645. What began as a retaliatory expedition against a single Algonquin tribe that supposedly harbored murderers, would, by the end of the conflict, develop into a regional battle between the Dutch, with their local Indian allies and English mercenaries from the North, and a loose confederacy of Algonquin tribes from western Long Island, New Jersey, and the lower Hudson Valley. The Narragansetts, a tributary of the powerful Mohawks and an important tribe in its own right, attempted to foster a larger confederacy of tribes during the conflict as well, sparking rumors among both Dutch and English of a "Great Indian Plot." In reality, the area tribes were simply conducting intertribal politics as had been done for generations before Dutch arrival. In the face of danger, smaller tribes would exchange tribute with larger tribes which would in turn protect their smaller brethren. Since most of the tribes fighting the Dutch were situated on the vital Wampum Coast, a stretch of land from Long Island up to the Rhode Island Coast, they held a commodity that was much sought after in the region, and thus were heavily courted by larger tribes who wished to gain access to the important all-purpose wampum currency. In short, when one combines the vital nature of the resources of the area of conflict with the numerous, powerful groups attempting to gain control of those resources and the people holding them, Kieft's War

becomes less about southern New Netherland politics and more a conflict with implications for the entire northeast coast of North America.⁴

Redrawing the Cultural Map

In order for Kieft's War to be truly understood within the larger, ever-changing cultural continuum of early New England/New Netherland society, the artificial cultural boundaries between native and European groups, two or more native groups, and two or more European groups, need to be reevaluated. In the intervening centuries between the conflict and the present, historians have continued the tradition of European scholarship from the early colonial period, which although is the only substantial source of primary accounts from the period, also all but ignores the native perspective. Edmund B. O'Callaghan, were specifically attempting to create a historical narrative centered around New York, and in the end left many key details out because of their narrow viewpoint. Like the early accounts from which they based their writings, historians often look at New Netherland history or New England history in a vacuum. The fact is, New Netherland, along with Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth and the other English colonies that made up what would become known as New England, were all pieces in a larger societal framework one could call the "Eastern Woodland Colonial Society". Since eastern woodland is a term used primarily to classify Native American tribes, and these same tribes played such a heavy part in the early colonial period, this new name for the entire society of what is today the Northeast United States is particularly apt. To look at events in New Netherland without venturing into the history of New England only tells half of a

⁴ Allen W. Trelease, *Indian Affairs in Colonial New York: The Seventeenth Century*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), 41-48. Most information on the "Great Indian Plot" can be found in English records, although Kieft himself discusses the alleged plot as a main cause of hostilities between Dutch and Indian.

story, since the boundaries set up by the settlers in the New World, although real to them, did not represent in and of themselves cultural partitions, and need to be described as simply jurisdictional limits. The native groups living around or within either northeast colony would have seen numerous connections between the Dutch and English, just as there were many connections between Algonquin tribes in southern New England and those on Long Island. Likewise, native groups would not have immediately recognized a social hierarchy of Europeans on top, natives on the bottom, as the whites clearly did, due, in their minds, to their believe in the Christian God, technological advantage, and eventually even skin color. Over time, however, both the English and Dutch would mold the New World society created in the wake of initial colonization into a distinct hierarchy with themselves occupying the top positions politically and culturally. Furthermore, a flaw of previous historical scholarship regarding Kieft's War that must be overcome is the assumption that the conflict was only Dutch versus Algonquin. Even recent works such as Evan Haefeli's analysis of the violence during Kieft's War does not take into account the complex interactions between Iroquois and Algonquin, as well as the English with Algonquin and Dutch. The war, and especially the events which caused it, had as much to do with intertribal relationships as they did they interracial ones. The changing face of Iroquois/Algonquin relations immediately before the outbreak of the Pequot War and Kieft's War played a large role in bringing those events about, as did interaction between Dutch and English. Kieft's War was not a race war, but a conflict that involved every group inhabiting the eastern woodland.

Since native groups did not bow to Europeans the moment they stepped off of their oceangoing ships, the melding of cultures which eventually would bring about

European domination through armed conflict occurred in three distinct steps. The first time period, from initial contact to about the mid-1630s, marked by partnerships based on lack of European population, abundance of valuable native trading goods, and a mutual misunderstanding of jurisdictional practices, will be known as the “Honeymoon Period”. Both sides felt they were in control, the Europeans because of their real technological and alleged theological superiority, the natives because it was their land and people to begin with, and at the time, their numerical superiority.⁵

Events during the mid 1630s would make it clear that the Europeans were not in control as they had originally thought. As the façade of their dominance was belied by traditional native tributary relationships trumping English and Dutch governmental jurisdiction based on property, the second phase of colonist/native cultural exchange would shatter white misperceptions, creating a new era of urgency known as “The Traditional Tributary Period”. As Europeans increasingly came to understand their lack of control over native populations ostensibly within their territories or spheres of influence, it became time to act to bring these tribes into a new order founded on the rule of colonial governments.

The final phase, or the “Euramerican Tributary Period”, driven by this newfound understanding of the dominance of tributary empires, would be marked by armed conflict instigated for the most part by colonists against natives, in order to control and dominate them with the end result of creating European-centered tributary alliances in the tradition of intertribal relationships. The Pequot War and Kieft’s War both occurred during this

⁵ To find talk of European superiority, one needs to look no further than the early narratives of John Smith, William Bradford, etc. However, an interesting work that takes the native perspective regarding this initial contact phase, see Daniel K. Richter, Facing East from Indian Country (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 41-68.

third phase. Using violence, both colonies would create symbols and destructive examples to meld the societies of eastern woodland into a Euramerican-dominated tributary empire whose jurisdiction would be understood by native populations. In short, the English and Dutch would use native political institutions to dominate and control them.⁶

The “Honeymoon Period”: Hudson’s Skirmishes

The seeds of the conflict known as Kieft’s War were probably first sown as early as September 1609, when Henry Hudson ventured up the river that was to bear his name. Early in the month, with his ship the *Half Moon* anchored near present-day Sandy Hook, New Jersey, Hudson received a number of natives on board, bearing gifts from their dugout canoes. The Indians exchanged tobacco for knives and beads, and both sides were well pleased with the commerce. The process was repeated day after day. Meanwhile, a reconnaissance party sent out from the *Half Moon* to explore the area between Staten Island and Long Island was attacked by two canoes of Indians. Their arrows killed one of Hudson’s men and wounded two others. When the original band of Indians came to the *Half Moon* the next day as if nothing happened, Hudson’s crew captured three of them, detaining them until they were able to escape by jumping into the water and swimming away. Thus, the first meeting between the Dutch and natives local to what would become New Netherland (in this case an Englishman flying Dutch colors and natives), ended with both promise of lucrative trade and violence. Still, there must

⁶ This theory of increasingly melding cultures is *very* loosely based on James Drake’s idea of “covalent societies”. For more on Drake’s view of colonial New England society, see Drake, *King Philip’s War*, 14-15.

have been much confusion on both sides. What was one to make of the seemingly fickle and forgetful behavior of the natives?⁷

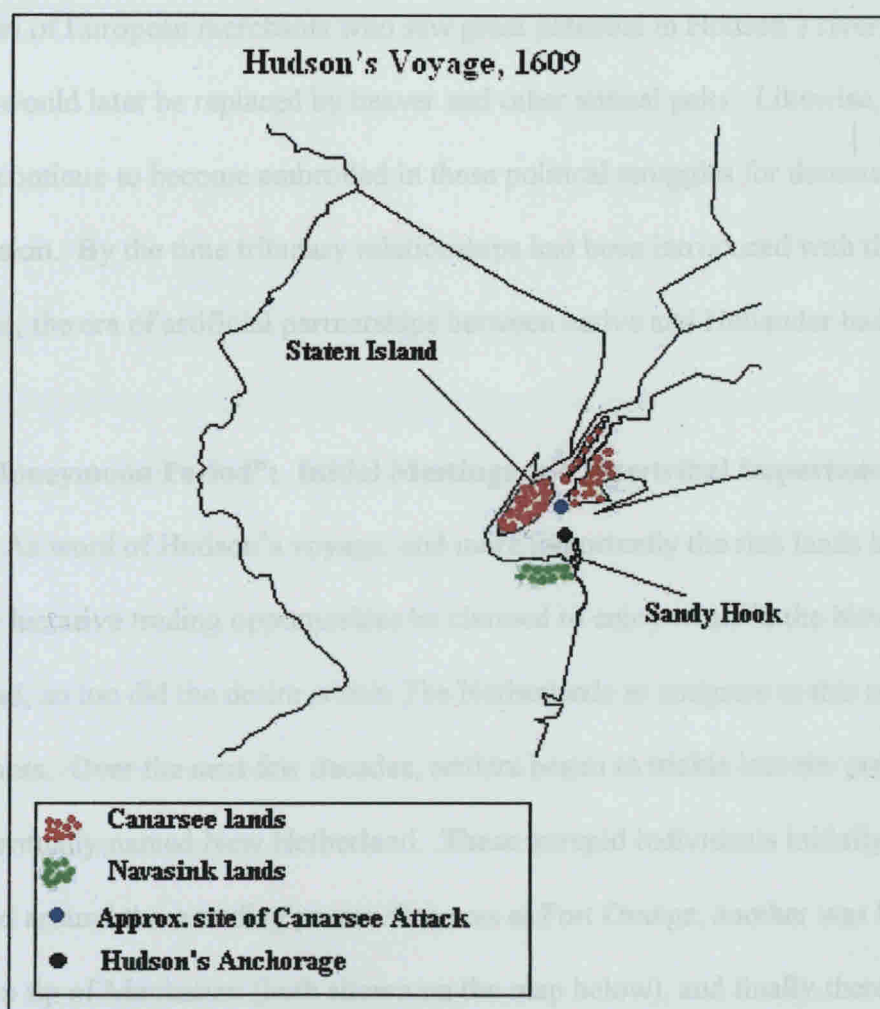
The conflict that transpired is in actuality the first recorded Dutch encounter with native patron/client politics. With no native accounts as evidence, it is impossible to know for sure the hierarchy of pre-contact Algonquin tribes in the vicinity of Sandy Hook. However, it can be inferred that the men conducting the reconnaissance mission were most likely attacked by members of the Canarsee tribe, while those trading directly on the *Half Moon* by way of Sandy Hook were part of a tribe from present-day coastal New Jersey known as the Navasink. As the Dutch would find later, the Canarsee were friendly with them in and around their territory. They were the tribe that allegedly ceded Manhattan Island to the Dutch for twenty-four dollars worth of goods (in actuality sixty guilders' worth). However, Hudson's party made a vital error brought about by ignorance of eastern woodland Indian culture; that is, they traded with a small, tributary band, all but ignoring one of the area's most powerful tribes, the Canarsee.

With lands extending from modern-day Brooklyn to Manhattan, and south to Staten Island, the Canarsee not only held highly fertile farming and fishing territory but also were located at a crossroads between the wampum-producing coastal tribes on the Long Island Sound and interior groups coveting the beaded belts for ceremonial purposes. Having been visited by an expedition led by Giovanni De Verrazzano in 1524 that explored the straits that would bear his name (which consequently traversed into the heart of Canarsee territory), the more powerful tribe would have known at least the

⁷ Trelease, Indian Affairs, 26.

technological superiority of the Europeans, and perhaps may have traded with the earlier group of white men from the east.⁸

Understanding the relationship between the Navasink and Canarsee tribes, it is easier to explain the seemingly rash attack on the European reconnaissance party. The Canarsee were merely attempting to assert their right to dominate trade between the newcomers and a band they considered either subservient, or a rival they wished to bring to subservience.



⁸ Trelease, Indian Affairs, 7, 27; William E. Golder, Long Island's First Inhabitants: A 9000 Year History of the Indian Occupation of Long Island, (Southold, NY: Southold Historical Society, 2002), 23, 26, 28.

It was a scene that was to be born out again decades later as Dutch traders in the Hudson Valley were forced to deal with protests from Mahican tribal leaders, angry that the Dutch were allowing Mohawk traders to traverse their tribal lands to trade with the Europeans. The patron/client political system in North America would confuse the Dutch for a time, but eventually they would come to understand its purpose, and even attempt to create their own tributaries.

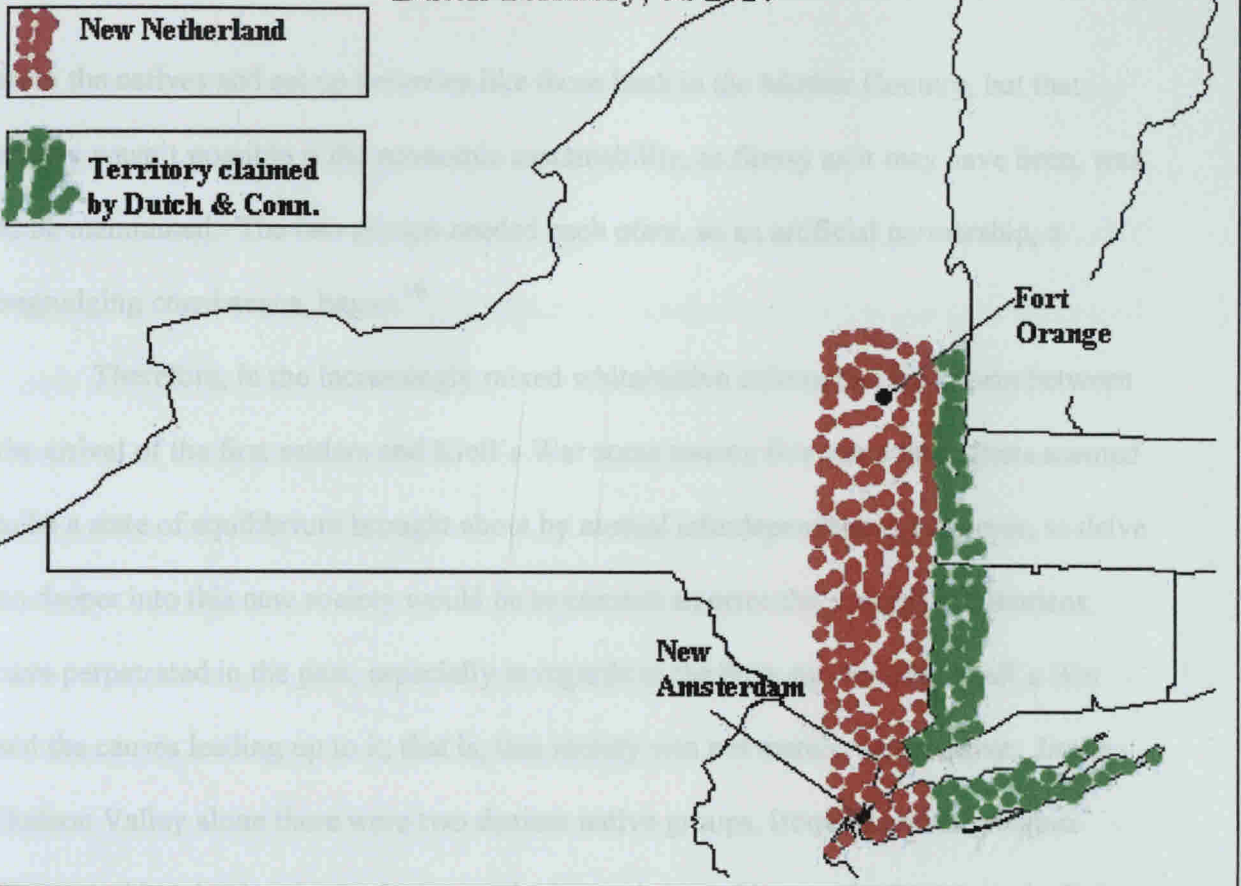
For now, the tobacco and other goods received from the Indians whetted the appetites of European merchants who saw great potential in Hudson's river. These tokens would later be replaced by beaver and other animal pelts. Likewise, the Dutch would continue to become embroiled in these political struggles for dominance and submission. By the time tributary relationships had been introduced with the Canarsees' violence, the era of artificial partnerships between native and Hollander had already begun.

"The Honeymoon Period": Initial Meetings and Intertribal Importance

As word of Hudson's voyage, and more importantly the rich lands he discovered and the lucrative trading opportunities he claimed to enjoy while in the New World began to spread, so too did the desire within The Netherlands to emigrate to this new-found wilderness. Over the next few decades, settlers began to trickle into the province that was eventually named New Netherland. These intrepid individuals initially were centered around three trading posts: One was at Fort Orange, another was located at the southern tip of Manhattan (both shown on the map below), and finally there was a smaller outpost on the Delaware, or South River that is not shown.⁹

⁹ Blank outline maps of New York and New Jersey courtesy of About.com.

Dutch Territory, ca 1626



For a time, peaceable relations between local natives in and around the Hudson and Delaware River valleys, centered on furs and European goods changing hands, ruled the day. From an economic standpoint, both groups were essential to keep the other side above the profit margin. The natives could not be wiped out or displaced, because they were necessary for trapping and collecting the furs which were then sold to the Dutch. Without the Dutch, natives in the vicinity of New Netherland would be forced to traverse through dangerous, enemy territory to reach either the French near Quebec or the English in Massachusetts and Plymouth colonies in order to buy European goods. With this balance in place, the relationship between the Algonquin tribes nearest to Fort Orange and New Amsterdam, the two main Dutch settlements at the time, and the Hollanders, took on the look of a partnership. The Dutch would have liked to simply take the land

from the natives and set up boweries like those back in the Mother Country, but that simply wasn't possible if the economic sustainability, as flimsy as it may have been, was to be maintained. The two groups needed each other, so an artificial partnership, a begrudging coexistence, began.¹⁰

Therefore, in the increasingly mixed white/native culture that took form between the arrival of the first settlers and Kieft's War some twenty five years later, there seemed to be a state of equilibrium brought about by mutual interdependence. However, to delve no deeper into this new society would be to commit an error that countless historians have perpetrated in the past, especially in regards to the facts surrounding Kieft's War and the causes leading up to it; that is, this society was not merely white/native. In the Hudson Valley alone there were two distinct native groups, Iroquois and Algonquin. These could be broken into subgroups, the Iroquois branching out in the area to include primarily Oneida and Mohawk, although other nations lay further to the West, while the Algonquin were split into numerous smaller tribes, the most prominent being the Mahicans. The peaceful stability inherent within this fledgling conglomerate of nations around 1620 owes itself more to equilibrium among these native groups than between the Dutch and these varied tribes. In the same fashion, unlike most accounts that show a breakdown between the Dutch and the Algonquin tribes living in New Netherland before Kieft's War, the war owes itself to a more complex disequilibrium between different

¹⁰ Trelease, Indian Affairs, 25-59; Michael Kammen, Colonial New York, A History, (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1975), 7-44; Russell Shorto, The Island at the Center of the World, (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 46-47.

Indian nations, different European groups, and finally, their interactions with each other, brought about by likeminded goals of tribute and dominance.¹¹

That intertribal relations played a larger part in the peaceful period before Kieft's War than any actions by the Dutch is apparent for two reasons. First, with the number of Dutch settlers relatively small, and their reluctance (especially in the beginning of colonization) to supply natives with firearms, European impact from Manhattan to Fort Orange and south to the Delaware was minor compared to the impact of one tribe on another. Although there was great economic gain involved in the interracial trade taking place, this incentive would only have created a tenser situation between native groups in the area vying for exclusive access, thus increasing the importance of intertribal diplomacy. The second piece of evidence that explains the effects of interaction between Indian nations relative to the Dutch is more concrete. When the Mahicans and Mohawks went to war in 1626, one of a number of skirmishes between these two tribes, the Dutch became entangled to the point that for years they abandoned their Hudson Valley settlements, and for a time the very notion of a Dutch presence in North America was challenged. They acted as a relatively minor ally to the Mahicans, and for their role in a growing tribute taking/tribute giving conflict, they paid a dear price. Since both reasons deal heavily with the Mohawks and Mahicans, and both of these tribes are key players in the coming war attributed to Governor Kieft, it is as essential to understand their history as it is to know the facts regarding Dutch interaction with either of those groups.¹²

¹¹ Golder, Long Island's First Inhabitants, 37-41. For an excellent primary source regarding early interaction with the Oneida and Mohawk tribes, see Harmen Meyndertsz van den Bogaert, A Journey into Mohawk and Oneida Country, 1634-1635, ed. and trans. Charles Gehring & William Starna (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988).

¹² G.T. Hunt, The Wars of the Iroquois, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1940), 31; Shirley W. Dunn, The Mohicans and Their Land: 1609-1730, (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press 1994), 80-81, 87; J. Franklin Jameson, Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664, (New York: Rowman and

Van Krieckenbeeck's Folly

When the Dutch were first embroiled in intertribal warfare in 1626, Algonquin Mahicans and Iroquois Mohawks had been fighting for control of the upper Hudson Valley for many decades. At the time, the leader of the small garrison at Fort Orange, Commander Daniel Van Krieckenbeeck was charged with protecting the settlers trading with both the nearby Mahicans, and to a lesser extent the Mohawks, for furs. When the Mahicans came to the fort to ask for aid against Mohawk encroachment, the Dutch leader was confident that a few volleys of musket fire would dispatch any Mohawk war party, as had Champlain's firearms during a similar incident in 1609. What Van Krieckenbeeck failed to recognize was that he chose the wrong side in a war of domination; the Mohawks were on their way up, gaining tribute from neighboring tribes, while the Mahicans were beginning to slowly weaken. His error in judgment, although understandable due to the close proximity and close trading ties with the Mahicans and Dutch, would have disastrous consequences for the Fort Orange settlement and in turn would vault the reputation of Mohawk warriors to lofty heights of bravery and ferocity.¹³

Upon leaving the fort with a small detachment, Van Krieckenbeeck's men "met the Maquaes [Mohawks], who fell so boldly upon them with a discharge of arrows that they were forced to fly, and many were killed." Next the account takes a grimmer turn when some were captured by the Iroquois war party. One soldier, Tymen Bouwensz, was "devoured, after having well roasted him. The rest were burnt.... The Indians carried an

Littlefield, 1968), 84-85, 131. Note: Henceforth this work will be noted as NNN. This source is a compilation of numerous primary accounts of New Netherland.

¹³ Samuel Champlain, Voyages of Samuel de Champlain, (New York: Indypublish.com, 2003, originally 1615), 90-91. The Dutch at Fort Orange were well versed regarding Champlain's dealings with the Iroquois. A company employee named Isaack de Rasiere comments about his dealings with the Iroquois in a 1626 letter back to Holland.

arm and a leg home to be divided among their families.” After the incident, Governor Peter Minuit ordered all settlers to relocate to New Amsterdam, leaving only a small armed detachment at Fort Orange.¹⁴

From this scene, it appears that the stereotypically warlike Mohawks have been the dominant tribe in the area for some time. However, evidence shows that in the time immediately preceding Dutch contact with the natives of the Hudson Valley, the Mahicans had been in firm control. As the Mohawks gained prominence, there was a time where both tribes were fairly equal, hence the time of peace between the societies of the area. Even at the time of Van Krieckenbeeck’s expedition, the Iroquois were far from dominant over the Hudson Valley. As late as 1634, a Dutch expedition into Mohawk country noticed a “ruined castle” about fifty miles west of Fort Orange. Their guides informed the expedition that the Mohawk fort marked their furthest eastern advance, and precipitated the war with the Mahicans almost a decade earlier. Even in the 1630s, the Mohawks were stopped well west of the Dutch settlement. As the Dutch stayed out of native politics in the area around Fort Orange after the incident in 1626, save only to broker trading partnerships, there was a period of peace between the whites and the natives. This peace was indicative of neither native group gaining the upper hand in the Hudson Valley, creating an uneasy period of stability. However, in the roughly six or seven years between the Dutch expedition into Iroquois country and the onset of Kieft’s War, the political situation in the Hudson Valley, as well as into the area surrounding

¹⁴ NNN, 84-85.

New Amsterdam, Long Island, and even southern Connecticut, was about to change drastically. The era of Iroquois supremacy was about to begin.¹⁵

“Traditional Tributary Period”: The New Iroquois Empire of Fur and Wampum

In the winter of 1634, three Dutch West India Company employees, workers of the entity that controlled New Netherland colony, set out from Fort Orange into the snowy landscape to the West of the Hudson. Their mission was simple, yet daunting. The men were to traverse into Mohawk and Oneida territory, areas far outside West India Company jurisdiction, to make diplomatic contact with the same tribe that had so soundly defeated Van Krieckenbeeck’s party less than a decade before. What the men found, rather than make them fear for their safety, shocked them into pity. One by one, the small group of envoys visited Indian towns, or castles, in the Adirondack wilderness. The sites were ravaged by sickness, decimated by a plague that killed more natives than any firearm or vindictive European extermination policy. Smallpox had preceded these Dutch visitors, and the signs were everywhere. Far from the proud warriors who stood their ground in the face of European firearms in 1626, the Mohawk nation looked like a skeleton of its vaunted heritage.¹⁶

However, from the ashes of the funeral pyres for the disease victims would rise a new Iroquoia, which would ignite an unprecedented wave of violence, eventually catapulting the Mohawk and their kindred tribes of the Five Nations to supremacy from French Canada to the tip of Long Island to piedmont South Carolina. Their prowess at irregular hit-and-run warfare, combined with a mixture of European firearms, traditional bows and arrows, and at times, sheer determination would force both the Dutch and

¹⁵ Hunt, The Wars of the Iroquois, 31 and Van den Bogaert, A Journey into Mohawk and Oneida Country, 22.

¹⁶ Van den Bogaert, A Journey into Mohawk and Oneida Country, xix, 4.

English to rethink their Indian policy until the American War of Independence almost a century and a half later.

As smallpox epidemics began to ravage the Iroquois population in the 1620s and 1630s, the decrease in population sparked two results. First, the Iroquois resorted to a common practice among eastern woodland natives to replace their dwindling numbers; that is, they substituted their fallen comrades with captives of war. In order to have captives, though, one must take an aggressive stance with neighbors. The Mohawks attacked the Mahicans to the East, the Huron to the North, and the Susquehannocks to the South. As they were successful in these “mourning wars”, there was a “marked intensification of rituals associated with warfare, diplomacy, death and adoption.” The principle component of these rituals is what necessitated the second result of the Iroquois population decline. Wampum was essential to these ceremonies, and therefore the Iroquois needed to take steps to secure a steady supply of the beads which were primarily found on the “wampum coasts” of the Long Island Sound. They entered into diplomatic relationships with important tribes along the coast like the Narragansetts, and eventually held most tribes in southern New England and the eastern coast of what is today the Bronx and Westchester County, New York, under tribute. The Mohawks and the other four nations comprising the Iroquois Confederacy also increased their already aggressive raids on inland tribes which garnered them hunting territory and beaver pelts. The net result of this new policy that was begun in the latter half of the 1630s was a tributary empire unmatched even by the Dutch or English in the area. By 1640, the mourning wars had bolstered the population in Iroquois country to the point that hunters in the area exhausted local beaver reserves. This eventuality caused another wave of expansion

centered on capturing fur shipments and hunting grounds, usually within the territories of northern tribes like the Huron.¹⁷

This seemingly unbridled expansion worried the Europeans in New Netherland and New England. It forced authorities in these colonies to rethink where their diplomatic resources should be spent. Why should time and effort go to courting traditional Algonquin allies when they were already under the thumb of the Mohawks or another group of the Iroquois? If the Dutch continued to consider themselves as partners with the small Algonquin tribes in and around the Hudson Valley, Manhattan, and western Long Island, would they not be partnering with mere tributaries of stronger nations? The European colonists in modern-day New York and New England began to realize something that few historians today mention; perhaps the traditional hierarchy of white colony to subordinate Indian groups within each colony simply was not true.

Most people have heard the funny anecdotes relating the many instances where crafty Europeans cheated natives out of lands that their tribes had held for generations by offering mere trinkets. The deal between the Canarsee tribe and the Peter Minuit-led group of Dutch colonists which ceded Manhattan to the newcomers from Europe for sixty guilders worth of beads and metal tools is but one, famous example. Of course, scholarship has now firmly established that far from these deals being derived from native stupidity or shortsightedness, they were actually more about cultural misunderstanding. The natives, for the most part, saw the land “purchases” as alliances, where gifts were exchanged for the right to traverse, hunt, and use the land alongside the

¹⁷ Neal S. Salisbury, “Toward the Covenant Chain: Iroquois and Southern New England Algonquians, 1637-1684”, in Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and their Neighbors in North America, 1600-1800, (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 61-64; Hunt, The Wars of the Iroquois, 33.

natives who lived on it. This explains why Dutch deeds into the 1640s often included clauses that allowed the natives who sold their land to remain living on it, usually until the generation who had sold the area had passed away. However they were viewed by the natives, it is apparent that Indians did not think about land and property in the same fashion that Europeans did.¹⁸

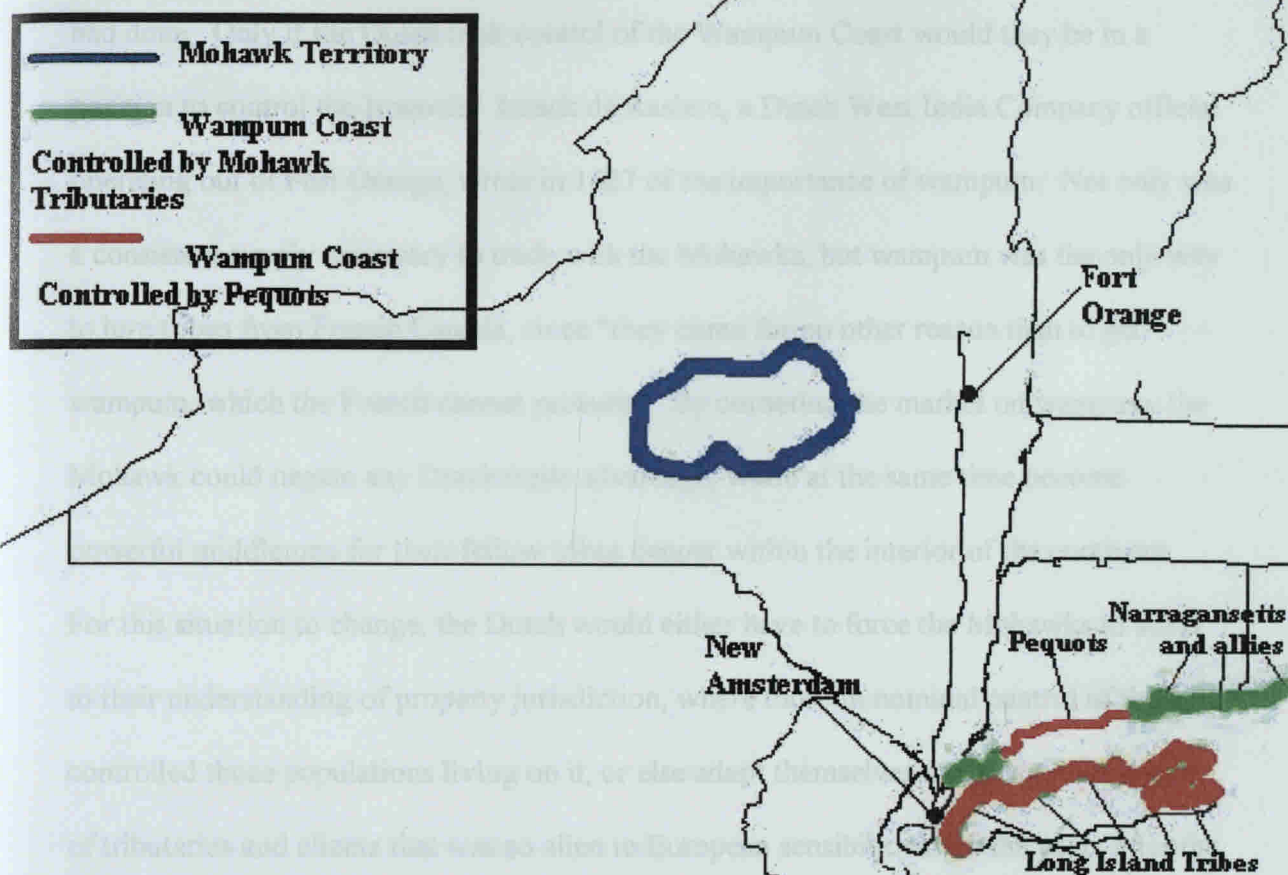
Now, as the Iroquois began to usurp power away from the English and Dutch in New England and New Netherland, respectively, it became clear that misunderstandings about property and jurisdiction could extend to a much higher level. Both countries' colonies derived their power from property. A colony claimed governmental ownership over a certain portion of land, and anyone living on that land was subject to the laws, and therefore the rule of the government in power. These European rules of jurisdiction arose during the feudal period, when serfs were bound to the land they farmed. Lords were given title over the land, and therefore over the people residing there. Colonial charters were set up in similar ways. A company or group of colonists was given control of a portion of territory by the monarch or, in the case of New Netherland, the States General of the Dutch Republic. The charter, if it referred to natives at all, considered them part of the landscape like wild animals, or freed the colonists to trade, convert, and generally command any indigenous populations as they saw fit. They were considered savages, completely devoid of government, and therefore needed political institutions imposed upon them. Jurisdiction deriving from property was a concept so central to being European that it took over thirty years of interaction between Native Americans and Europeans in the eastern woodland of North America before any whites began to think

¹⁸ The idea that natives looked at property sales as alliances and expressions of friendship is well documented. See Trelease, Indian Affairs, 1-72 and Kammen, Colonial New York, A History, 23-47.

that perhaps their system may have been compromised. Since local Indians had a completely different concept of property, how could legitimate government be derived from it? The English and Dutch were nominally in control of the land on the Atlantic Coast. Flags were thrown into the sand of the beaches, oaths were taken that claimed the land for King/Queen (or Stadtholder) and for Country under the Grace of God, coats of arms were carved or burned into trees marking artificially created and heavily disputed boundaries. All of these symbols meant little to the Iroquois, who simply controlled the local tribes in the same manner that they had been controlled for centuries; that is, they forced them to pay tribute, and in so doing created a system whereby it was clear who was at the top of the societal hierarchy. The Mohawks used their tenacious reputation and brute force to control two vital area tribes; first, their age-old adversary the Mahicans, and another Algonquin tribe on the Rhode Island coast, the Narragansetts. Both of these tribes held tribute over smaller Algonquin tribes along the coasts of eastern Connecticut, Rhode Island, and the southeastern tip of modern New York State. In other words, the Mohawks were in control of two tribes that were in turn in control of a vast portion of the Wampum Coast. These relationships held strong even in the face of stiff European opposition. When the Narragansetts of Southern New England began to default on their payments of wampum to the English, the New England authorities became flabbergasted when they heard reports that the same Narragansetts were continuing to make good on their tribute to the Mohawks. In essence, the Mohawks weren't playing by the rules.¹⁹

¹⁹ For an in depth look at how feudal values influenced early colonial society, see Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 3-14; Salisbury, "Toward the Covenant Chain", 63.

Extent of Mohawk Influence, 1640



It is no coincidence that this new era of Iroquois dominance occurs less than five years prior to Kieft's War. The balance of power in the area, the decades of power-brokering between English and Dutch over which native groups would answer to which European colony, was shaken to its core. The Dutch, being closest to the Mohawks, saw a potentially powerful ally and trading partner. However, in order to effectively utilize such an ally, a number of policies would need to change. First, Iroquois would need to take precedence over the smaller, now fur-depleted Algonquins that had traditionally been firm allies to the Dutch. Second, these Algonquin that were nearly completely subjugated by the Iroquois element would need to be reclaimed by the colonists in New

Netherland, this time not as partners, but as tributaries in the same manner as the Iroquois had done. Only if the Dutch took control of the Wampum Coast would they be in a position to control the Iroquois. Isaack de Rasiere, a Dutch West India Company official operating out of Fort Orange, wrote in 1627 of the importance of wampum. Not only was a consistent supply necessary to trade with the Mohawks, but wampum was the only way to lure tribes from French Canada, since “they come for no other reason than to get wampum, which the French cannot procure.” By cornering the market on wampum, the Mohawk could negate any Dutch trade advantage, while at the same time become powerful middlemen for their fellow tribes deeper within the interior of the continent. For this situation to change, the Dutch would either have to force the Mohawks to adapt to their understanding of property jurisdiction, where those in nominal control of the land controlled those populations living on it, or else adapt themselves to this age-old system of tributaries and clients that was so alien to European sensibilities. In the years after the Iroquois expansion of the mid 1630s, first the English, then Dutch would increasingly choose the latter, sparking the wars of the late 1630s and 1640s between colonists and native tribes.

A missionary by the name of Megapolensis, who traveled into Mohawk country in the 1640s to gauge Iroquois willingness to be converted to Dutch Calvinism, wrote back to the Netherlands boasting that, “our Mahakas carry on great wars against the Indians of Canada.... Though they are so very cruel to their enemies, they are very friendly to us.” This important buffer against the French and their Indian allies needed to be maintained by undercutting the Mohawk attempts to gain wampum producing tributaries within Dutch jurisdiction. If these tribes on the coast would not come

peaceably, the only alternative, in the minds of the Europeans, would be violent coercion.²⁰

“Traditional Tributary Period”: The Value of the Wampum Coast

What was this magical commodity, known as wampum, or sewant, that could decide the outcome of many decades of power struggle between natives and Europeans? First, shells were harvested from the shoreline. Although wampum shells could be found all along the eastern coast, the most valuable came from the shores of the Long Island Sound. The sheltered coves and inlets of the Long Island, Rhode Island, and Connecticut shorelines produced smaller, finer shells, and often in the most valuable colors, which were black, white, and especially purple. Once the shells were harvested, native craftsmen would finish the shells into beads, and drill holes into them, at first with primitive awls, later with metal ones procured from Dutch and English traders. These beads would then be strung into tightly packed rows, eventually comprising long belts. The belts were measured by hand lengths, and their value was spoken as so many hands or fathoms of wampum.²¹

The Dutch first came into contact with wampum as a form of currency. With little metal coinage existing in North America at the time, the Dutch needed a way to continue to trade without the traditional means of determining value. Instead, they utilized this native currency. Since their colony of New Amsterdam happened to lie slightly to the west of the richest wampum shores, using wampum was an easy, highly lucrative alternative to other forms of credit. The Dutch traded European manufactured

²⁰ Arnold J. F. Van Laer, ed., Documents Relating to New Netherland, 1624-1626, (San Marino, CA: Published by the Henry E. Huntington Library in limited quantity, 1924), 202-203, 211-215, 223-227.

²¹ John A. Strong, The Algonquin Peoples of Long Island from Earliest Times to 1700, (Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1997), 152-153;

goods such as kettles, awls, axes, and duffel cloth to the Long Island natives in exchange for belts of wampum that were then transported north for exchange with the Mahicans and Mohawk, who were, at least at first, cut off from their own supply of the valuable beads. Why did the inland tribes desire these wampum belts so much? To these tribes, the wampum was an all-purpose ceremonial tool. It was mostly used for commemorating certain religious and political gatherings. For example, if a large meeting between tribal leaders occurred, a special wampum belt would be created, which later generations could use as proof that the meeting and the results from that meeting, had indeed transpired.²²

It was the goal of any inland tribe to secure a steady supply of wampum. The fundamental conflict arose between the Dutch and English, who wished to use this circumstance as a way to gain inland allies and trading partners, and those tribes that were already in control of the Wampum Coast. Besides the Mohawk, there was one other large tribe that held sway in the area. The Pequots had steadily been gaining allies around the same time the Mohawks had begun their dramatic rise. Now the entire Wampum Coast was subjugated by either the Narragansetts, who were in turn tributaries to the Mohawks, the Mahicans who were in the same position as the Narragansetts, or the Pequots. Unlike the Mohawks, however, the Dutch and English saw little use for the Pequots as potential allies. Their land and their tributaries were far more important than their allegiance, and as soon as reasons for an equal partnership gave way, the situation became disastrous for the native side.

“Euramerican Tributary Period”: The Pequot Power Vacuum

The Mohawk expansion awakened colonial authorities to the possibility of native dominance in the area. Roger Williams during the late 1630s spoke to the Massachusetts

²² Snow, The Iroquois, 111-113.

authorities about the dangers of an alliance between the traditionally belligerent Narragansetts and the Mohawks. Also during this time, rumors of “Great Indian Plots” began to emerge, where whites claimed previously small, independent tribes were banding together for attempted racial genocide with the eventual aim of destroying Europeans in North America. Both the English and Dutch in the region would need to deal with this situation if they were to achieve their goal to utterly dominate the territory within their jurisdictions, and in turn, control the native populations within. These attempts at recharacterizing colonial/native relations were the Pequot War in New England, and Kieft’s War in New Netherland.

Attacking this new Mohawk/Narragansett alliance was simply untenable for either colony, so the English looked to make an example of the only other tribe with substantial wampum coast holdings. By completely destroying the Pequots, by wiping their influence off the face of Southern New England, a powerful message would be sent; from that day forward, it was the Europeans who were in control of the land and people, not the Old Guard, or the tributary alliances that had once ruled the day.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Pequot War was that it was begun by the actions of a group of colonists from New Netherland, not the English. As furs began to dry up in and around Manhattan, and the Hudson Valley became tightly controlled by traders already familiar with either the Mahicans or Mohawks in the area, a small group of Dutch traders looked toward the Connecticut River Valley as a possible way to gain furs. However, thinking that they might be able to make some money faster through kidnapping than by legitimate trading opportunities, a number of the businessmen at the new post, known as The Hope, captured a Pequot sachem, or chief, named Tatobem. The

Dutch demanded a large ransom of furs and wampum for the safe return of the tribal leader. All went according to plan, until after the payoff was delivered, when a few of the kidnappers decided to kill the sachem anyway. It is unknown why the murder took place, but the stupidity of a few men would shake the political landscape of the entire region, and set off a chain of events that would eventually lead to the deaths of scores of Dutch families during Kieft's War. In a time where hundreds of senseless killings would be attributed to native "savages" during both the Pequot War and Kieft's War and the "punishment" conducted by English and Dutch butchers would be deemed righteously handed down by the Christian God, this act of violence by a group of European colonists seemed the most senseless, and surely the least righteous. However, it is clear from the way these traders killed the sachem that more was going on than a random act of violence. The sachem was mutilated before being killed, and the violence exhibited the same sort of ritualistic nature that would come to be expected of the Dutch during Kieft's War. These acts of violence were as much about stripping the victim of dignity and manhood as it was inflicting pain.²³

Tatobem's death sparked a wave of violence and retaliation similar to that of Kieft's War, but with a very different culmination. The Pequots avenged their sachem's death by attacking the Dutch trading post, while a group of Niantics, tributaries to the Pequots, attacked and killed an English trader named John Stone who was also looking to trade for furs in the area of the Connecticut River. This murder was reason enough, in the minds of the English, to declare all out war on the Pequots. The Pequot defense was

²³ Laurence M. Hauptman & James D. Werry, The Pequots in Southern New England: The fall and rise of an American Indian nation, (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma, 1990), 71-73. For a study on violence during Kieft's War, see Evan Haefeli, "Kieft's War and the Cultures of American Violence," in Lethal Imagination: Violence and Brutality in American History, (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 17-40.

understandable. Said a Pequot ambassador who sought peace after the outbreak of hostilities, “we distinguish not between *Dutch* and *English*, but tooke them to be one Nation, and therefore we doe not conceive that we wronged you, for they slew our king”. The Pequots and their allies were guilty of a crime that would be repeated by Europeans looking at natives for centuries; that is, they attributed the actions of one nation to another.²⁴

The English were not interested in excuses. That Stone was an outcast from Massachusetts Bay, a pariah from the same group of colonists who now considered him a martyr, mattered little. In August 1636, volunteers from Massachusetts Bay began sacking Pequot settlements, until a small force was able to sail into Pequot Harbor and demand Stone’s killers, one thousand fathoms of wampum tribute, and Pequot children that could be used as hostages to ensure Pequot obedience. These demands create questions regarding English motives: Are they out to find Stone’s killers and bring them to trial, as they would if they were looking to create a societal partnership based on justice (European justice, of course, but what the English considered fair nonetheless), or were they looking for something that transcended punishment for one man’s murder? One thousand fathoms of *tribute*, and Pequot hostages meant a fundamental reordering of southern New England society. The English, in the wake of Iroquois belligerence and dominance over the Narragansetts and other New England tribes, were attempting to create their own tributary empire. There was no need for the Pequots to answer the onerous ultimatum, because the Massachusetts volunteers were content to do some light looting, then sail away. Due to some internal conflicts, the Pequots were unable to mount

²⁴ John Mason, A Brief History of the Pequot War Especially of the Memorable Taking of their Fort at Mistick in Connecticut in 1637, (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1736), 12.

a counterattack until April of the following year, when they assailed the town of Wethersfield, killing nine English settlers. Now the English had the motive to make good on their ultimatum. Under the command of John Mason and John Underhill, a force of United Colonies volunteers stormed the main Pequot settlement at Mystick, burning every building to the ground, and killing hundreds of Pequot men, women, and children. The scene was horrific, and sent shockwaves throughout the many tribes that had ties to the Pequots, peaceful or otherwise.²⁵

The tribes loyal to the English side during the conflict could not reconcile their cultural values with the carnage displayed around them. Societal norms in southern New England Algonquin society dictated that battles and wars be conducted on a small scale, which kept casualty counts low. Was not the torching of Mystick really just revenge for the deaths of nine English colonists killed a short time earlier? Natives involved with the battle could not understand English actions. Even tribes that had been enemies of the Pequots for generations were outraged. The English, for their part, misinterpreted native protests. John Underhill's account of the battle portrays his Indian allies as cowards, sickened by what he considers a just act ordained by God. To Underhill, the local tribes did not have the stomach for war.²⁶

What these natives were unable to stomach or understand was English motives. As revenge for nine deaths, the attack on the Pequots was unnecessary overkill. However, if the English were out to simultaneously wipe out a tribe and in turn gain their holdings on the Wampum Coast, while sending a message to other local tribes that the same could happen to them, then the torching of Mystick was a perfectly orchestrated

²⁵ Hauptman, The Pequots, 72-74.

²⁶ Mason, A Brief History, 13-15; John Underhill, Newes from America, (London, 1638), 10-12.

event. It was quick, strong, and exceedingly thorough. The English were not looking to maintain the status quo, to bring the area of southern New England back to a peaceful condition where English colonists could live unmolested. They not only destroyed nearly every Pequot settlement, but tracked the fugitives as they fled New England and sought refuge with friendly tribes on Long Island, in the southern Hudson Valley, and into Mohawk country. After the massacre, it became illegal to be Pequot, or to be allied with the outlawed tribe. The colonists from Massachusetts Bay and elsewhere were looking to dominate the area using native ideas of tributary relationships, since their traditional form of governmental jurisdiction through property ownership held little sway over the tribes in the region. From the demands for tribute to the eventual destruction of an entire tribe, the English were now in firm command of a significant portion of vital territory.²⁷

The annihilation of the Pequots reverberated down into areas closer to and nominally under the jurisdiction of New Netherland. In the years leading up to the war, the Pequots had been expanding the tributary relationships not only on the Connecticut coast, but also on eastern Long Island. These tribes, including the Shinnecock, Montauk, and Corchaug were closely tied to the Pequots through kin relationships, and both groups shared similar languages. On the eve of Pequot destruction, the Long Island tribes were paying them substantial tribute in wampum in exchange for protection. Now, with the Pequot all but gone, these Long Island natives, who just happened to sit on a treasure trove of tiny Quahog shells used for making wampum, were independent of any tributary obligations.²⁸

²⁷ For a brief look at Indian reaction to the attack at Mystick, see Jill Lepore, *In the Name of War*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 28.

²⁸ Strong, *The Algonquin Peoples of Long Island*, 154-155.

The feeding frenzy began almost immediately. As Pequot fugitives sought refuge among kin in these closely related Algonquin tribes on Long Island, the English pursued them, bringing with them proposals for a similar form of tributary alliance, with the English taking the place of their previous, now subdued, masters. A Long Island sunksquaw, or female tribal leader, who was questioned about the whereabouts of Sassacus, the grand sachem of the Pequots who allegedly fled to Long Island in the wake of the massacre, was given a proposal to pay tribute to New England in exchange for assurance of protection and trading privileges. She readily agreed, claiming she had only paid tribute to the Pequots when she was forced to, and that her two hundred warriors would swear allegiance to the English. Wyandanch, a Montauk sachem and influential personality among all of the tribes on eastern Long Island, was likewise given an opportunity to shift allegiance over to the English. He entered into an agreement with Lyon Gardiner, an English representative who fought in the Pequot War and now was looking for land off of the coast of Long Island, whereby the Montauks would hand over any Pequot fugitives and become tributaries to the English. In exchange, Wyandanch gained a favorable status with English traders and became a middleman, of sorts, between the Europeans and local tribes.²⁹

The English were not the only group in the area looking to increase their dominance over this newly created treasure trove of small, independent tribes on the Wampum Coast. Miantonomo (sometimes referred to as Miantonomi), leader of the Narragansetts, who were themselves tributaries of the Mohawks, also visited the Long Island tribes. He used a two-part argument to reason with the smaller tribes and demand

²⁹ Strong, The Algonquin Peoples of Long Island, 156-157; Lyon Gardiner, Relation of the Pequot Warres, (Boston, 1660), 150, 153.

their allegiance to the Narragansetts instead of the English. First he boasted of the Narragansett role in the destruction of the Pequots, claiming the English had given them substantial supplies of firearms and that they would soon be in control of all the tribes of southern New England. Next, Miantonomo portrayed the English as murderers, citing the torching of Mystick as reason enough to mistrust them. The Long Island tribes were torn and afraid of reprisals from whichever group they decided not to align with.³⁰

As the 1630s came to a close, the cultural fabric of southern New England, the Hudson Valley, and Long Island was in tatters relative to its form only five years earlier. The Iroquois, their tributaries the Narragansetts, the English, and soon the Dutch, were all vying for control of those left orphaned by the destruction of the Pequots. The Dutch, with their close proximity to the Long Island tribes and numerous other tribes in and around Manhattan that were closely related to these independent tribal groups, would push, and push hard, to dominate groups that they had once been equal partners with.

“Euramerican Tributary Period”: Kiefts War, the “Great Indian Plot”, and the Symbols of Dominance

With all of the political maneuverings, the expansive and complex tributary alliances that were being created and destroyed, and the pressure being exerted on the tribes in and around New Amsterdam, the governmental seat of the Dutch colony, the partnership bred from years of peaceful trade was coming to an end. No longer could the Dutch treat their neighboring tribes as equals, since the Mohawks, the English, and the Algonquins in southern New England were all knocking on the door, waiting for the right moment to swoop in and grab lucrative tributaries.

³⁰ Strong, The Algonquin Peoples of Long Island, 157-160.

Into the middle of this political maelstrom came Governor Willem Kieft, a failed merchant who had been burned in effigy in La Rochelle, France for questionable business practices. His family, however was well connected (a close relative of his can be seen in Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*), and so the Dutch West India Company sent him off to govern their New Netherland colony. His early directives as governor show him to be rather astute at handling the now tense Dutch/Indian situation. He stabilized the price of wampum by regulating its use, and set up a system which gave the government more control over land transactions, cutting down on arguments between Hollanders and tribal leaders. The fact was, though, that the traditional needs of both groups that created a partnership between them was breaking down. Furs were drying up in the area, and the tribes in and around Manhattan were most useful as political subordinates that could increase the power of New Netherland's tributary empire (and through it Dutch wampum holdings). Kieft's next move has been much maligned by historians for its brashness and utter contempt for the local natives, but makes perfect sense when operating within this atmosphere of patron/client protection between powerful political units and less powerful subgroups; that is, he issued an edict demanding tribute from the local tribes. Kieft opened a council meeting with the following directive:

Whereas the Company is put to great expense both in building fortification and in supporting soldiers...we have therefore resolved to demand from the Indians who dwell around here...some contributions in the form of skins, maize, and seawan, and if there be any nation which is not in a friendly way disposed to make such contribution it shall be urged to do so in the most suitable manner.³¹

From a simple weekly meeting would spring a governmental order that would profoundly change the relationship between the New Netherland Colony and its neighboring tribes.

That the edict was laughed at by the involved tribes, the Hackensacks, Canarsees,

³¹ Shorto, Island at the Center of the World, 118-119.

Wecquaesgeeks, Tappans, and Raritans, and that the directive was loosely enforced if at all means little. The importance of the order lies in its originality and timing. For Kieft to give such an order at a time where tributary politics were at a peak in the area, meant that he was acutely aware of the situation among the neighboring tribes, and was now throwing the Dutch hat into the ring.³²

Colonists who had been in the New World for a time thought the directive showed that Kieft was anything *but* aware of the native situation; to them, perhaps Kieft was not as native savvy as he appeared earlier. The truth was Kieft had very few direct dealings with the natives, but his location at New Amsterdam, a crossroads even in 1638 for the entire east coast of North America, made him privy to something nearly as vital in the early colonial period. Kieft clearly heard many reports from outlying villages both on the Dutch and English frontiers. This information, some of it valid, most of it mere rumor and speculation, is evident in a defense of his actions written after the war. In this treatise, lost until the twentieth century, the governor attributes the war to one main cause, a Great Indian Plot that nearly created a confederacy of every tribe from southern New England, south to Long Island, and west to the Pavonian frontier (modern-day central New Jersey). For Kieft, this threat was daunting enough to put down with violence at all costs.

Was there, as Kieft and dozens of other colonial sources in the English colonies and outlying Dutch settlements asserted, a “Great Indian Plot” to exterminate the Europeans from Eastern Woodland Colonial Society? Most historians dismiss the defense as mere myth, paranoia used by the English to justify strong-arming southern

³² Edmund B. O’Callaghan, History of New Netherland, or New York Under the Dutch, (New York: Reprint Co., 1967, orig. 1846), 293.

New England tribes into their tributary empire, which in turn was passed on as rumor to the New Netherland colony. Could this plot be a cultural misunderstanding brought about by these intertribal political machinations during the time period?

The information regarding the Plot seems to originate from an exchange between Wyandanch, the wily Montauk sachem who allied his tribe with the English in Connecticut to gain an economic advantage over his neighboring Algonquin groups, and Lyon Gardiner, the English settler who first came to Long Island looking for Indians receptive to entreaties regarding allegiance against the fugitive Pequots. During his visit with the Montauks, Gardiner heard of Miantonomo's stopover where he pressed the Long Island tribes for an alliance. The Narragansett chief wished that "we must be one, as the English are one; otherwise, we shall all shortly be gone". His plan called for all of the sachems of southern New England and Long Island to band together, and "when [these sachems] see the three fires that will be made at the end of forty days hence", the Algonquin warriors were to "kill men, women and children, but not the cows", since they would feed the natives until deer populations could be replenished.³³ After hearing such an account it wouldn't be a huge logical leap to assume what would happen to the smaller Dutch colony after the English were out of the way.

Derivatives of this account were written in nearly every history of the time period. Most, like the snippet above, portray Miantonomo as a blood-thirsty savage who would stop at nothing to inflict genocide on the hapless English population of the New World. His extreme, reactionary stance does not fit with a tribal leader who shrewdly brokered an alliance with a more powerful tribe of an entirely different language and cultural

³³ James Truslow Adams, History of the Town of Southampton, (Port Washington, NY: I.J. Friedman, 1935), 69-70.

group, played both sides against each other during the Pequot War, finally joining with the English when it was clear their side would be victorious, and generally navigated his tribe through one of the most turbulent eras in early American history. If all-out race war was Miantonomo's design, why support the English? Narragansett, and more importantly, Mohawk support for the Pequots may have produced the very results in 1637 that seemed ludicrous to Wyandanch by 1642.³⁴

In another account of the meeting between Wyandanch and Miantonomo, written by an unknown author, a different picture of the encounter comes to light. In *Relation of the Indian Plott*, Miantonomo is more interested in "cutting off the English," and stopping the Long Island tribes from giving wampum tribute to the authorities in New England. The Narragansett begins his meeting in this account by giving gifts of wampum to each Long Island sachem visited, which the author supposes must be some sort of payoff to help implement attacks against the English. However, could giving a small amount of wampum to the most wampum-rich Indian tribes on the planet really constitute a bribe? Gifts such as the ones given by Miantonomo were the cement that bound tributary agreements, and essentially provided hard copies of alliances for this Algonquin culture which lacked writing.³⁵

Which source is to be believed? Was Miantonomo bent on race war, or trying to sway the Long Island tribes away from the English and into the arms of the Narragansett/Iroquois tributary empire? Lyon Gardiner, the man directly connected to the account, also published a history of the Pequot War and its aftermath, with a section regarding his dealings with Wyandanch. In it, Miantonomo's parley with the Long Island

³⁴ Strong, *The Algonquin Peoples of Long Island*, 155-156.

³⁵ [No Author], "Relation of the Indian Plott, 1642" in *Massachusetts Historical Society's Proceedings*, vol. 10, (Boston Massachusetts Historical Society, 1889), 162-164.

sachems does not take on the tone of a belligerent, would-be butcher. Instead, he attacks England's ability to complete its end of the potential tributary alliance between Wyandanch and the white men from across the Long Island Sound. Wyandanch explained to Gardiner,

They [The Narragansetts] say I must give no more wampum to the English, for they are no Sachems...they have no tribute given them; there is but one king in England, who is over them all, and if you would send him 100,000 fathom of wampum, he would not give you a knife for it, nor thank you.³⁶

Gardiner's history does imply that Miantonomo planned some sort of uprising, but his arguments deal almost exclusively with discrediting New England's ability to fulfill their requirements as patrons of the Long Island tribes. Miantonomo uses the Pequots as another example that shows English ineptitude at working with the traditionally native tributary method. "The Pequits gave them wampum and beaver, which they loved so well, but they...killed them because they had killed an Englishman." Miantonomo was appealing to Algonquin sensibilities regarding murder. In the Narragansett's mind, the Pequots had been good tributaries to the English, and paid for their crimes in full with their tributary payments, only to have the English break their alliance and destroy the entire Pequot nation. The English took more than they gave back, and they would do the same to Wyandanch and his compatriot Long Island sachems.³⁷

To call these meetings a "Great Indian Plot" is most definitely hyperbole, but at the same time, the threat of a powerful alliance between Narragansetts, Mohawks, and

³⁶ Gardiner, *Relation of the Pequot Warres*, 153.

³⁷ Gardiner, *Relation of the Pequot Warres*, 153-154. It is interesting to wonder whether the native groups perceived a "Great White Plot." During King Philip's War, the Wampanoags who were fighting the English could not understand why Rhode Island and Connecticut, who were politically jousting with Massachusetts Bay, would so quickly forget their differences with the larger colony and come to its aid. In the same way, European commonality overrode jurisdictional difference, as English rushed to help their Dutch brethren later in the war. Both the Dutch and English were involved in the onset of the Pequot War as well, with one native even remarking that there was no difference between the two in his mind. At times it must have seen like both colonies were conspiring to oppress the natives of the entire extended region.

smaller Algonquin tribes on eastern Long Island was both real and destructive to European aims of dominance in the region. However, in both of the volumes which are considered the definitive histories of Colonial New York and Indian/Colonist interactions in New York respectively, the Plot is either overlooked completely, or left to a small footnote. There is no question that Kieft and the numerous sources misinterpreted native actions, but that does not mean that the entire idea of natives conspiring to create intertribal tributary alliances over the English or Dutch should be relegated out of the historical narrative.³⁸

More important than rumors coming from the Dutch frontier, the colonists of New Netherland would face another even more daunting Algonquin alliance that would bring the Dutch in the New World to the brink of utter ruin. The alliance would be born, not in the face of English or Dutch efforts to begin their own alliance with the natives, but from Dutch efforts to completely dominate tribes north of Manhattan through their actions during Kieft's War. This new confederation of tribes around Manhattan would be a response to the violence perpetrated by the Dutch against these tribes. Violence, like in the Pequot War involving the English and those tribes they wished to make tributaries, would be used as a tool and a symbol to completely subjugate the tribes involved, and signal to those that were neutral or allied with the Dutch that a new era of European control had begun.

Like Miantonomo's claim that the English would not hold up their end of their tributary relationships, the edict issued by Kieft demanding tribute payment was taken with similar disdain by the local tribes around New Amsterdam. In May 1640, less than a

³⁸ One of the only histories written in the last thirty years to even discuss the plot, in footnote form, is Trelease, Indian Affairs, 70.

year after Kieft's order, a group of Raritan Indians met with a sloop full of Dutch traders that made periodic commercial voyages into their territory. Instead of coming aboard with the usual bounty of beaver pelts and other valuable objects, the Raritans carried squirrel skins. One native even smacked the captain of the sloop in the face with one of the small, rodent furs. Kieft had demanded skins from the local tribes, and the Raritans were happy to oblige. The Raritans, with their squirrel pelts, were essentially saying "no, thank you" to Kieft's offer of tributary alliance. They went one step further, attempting to take control of the vessel, when a sudden hailstorm allowed the Dutch to sail away to safety. That these unprecedented acts of defiance and attempted theft occurred the next spring after Kieft's edict is no coincidence, and when he heard the news of the incident, coupled with a rumor that the Raritans had stolen some pigs from a plantation on Staten Island, he decided to press his tributary demands. He sent his secretary, Cornelis Van Tienhoven with a detachment of Dutch troops, and demanded reparation for the theft of the pigs. This payment happened to be in corn, skins, and wampum, exactly the same commodities demanded of the natives in Kieft's tributary ordinance. When the Indians refused, claiming they had nothing to do with the stolen pigs, the Dutch expedition attacked, killing a number of Raritans and capturing their sachem's brother. The Dutch, still fuming about the symbolic defiance exhibited by the Raritans on the sloop, countered by torturing the sachem's brother "in his private parts with a piece of split wood," reminiscent of the beginning of the Pequot War a few years prior.³⁹

This act of violence was no normal event in the vicinity of New Amsterdam. Relations between the local Algonquins and the Dutch had been fairly peaceful, and the

³⁹ Trelease, Indian Affairs, pg. 65; Haefeli, "Kieft's War and the Cultures of American Violence", 19; NNN, 208.

few conflicts between the two were marked by small scuffles lacking the sort of ritualized torture that occurred after the skirmish with the Raritans. That the events near the Raritan village were politically motivated, and symbolic of Dutch aims to dominate the Raritans and other groups in the area, was not lost on local colonists. David de Vries, a settler who was ardently opposed to the war (his estate on Staten Island would be attacked and burned by angry native war parties) and Kieft's actions from the very start of his tenure in the New World, called the events near the Raritan village "acts of tyranny." These words were not simple rhetoric from a man speaking out against an unjust war; the acts were not only tyrannical, but were meant to portray an autocratic message. The Dutch wanted nothing more than to tyrannize the Raritans and force them into a tributary alliance. If the defiant Raritans fell, so too would the other local tribes, or so the thinking went.⁴⁰

Other area tribes voiced their disgust for Kieft's offer of tributary status. When de Vries visited the Tappan Indians, they asked him to leave, stating, "the Sachem [Kieft], who was now at the fort...must be a very mean fellow to come to live in this country...and now wish to compel them [the Tappans and other local tribes] to give him their corn for nothing".⁴¹ Like Miantonomo voicing his reservations about the English, these tribesmen north of Manhattan did not see any benefit for their joining with the Dutch, and therefore would not submit to them. The Raritans, too, refused to submit in the face of this attempted restructuring of societal hierarchies. As spring began in 1641, they retaliated for their sachem's brother, attacking the Dutch settlements on Staten Island, killing some of de Vries' tenant farmers and burning houses and barns. The standard native response, under societal customs, would have been to kill or capture an

⁴⁰ NNN, 208-209.

⁴¹ Trelease, Indian Affairs, pg. 66, quoted from NNN, 209.

appropriate number of settlers, thus avenging the egregious crime committed by Van Tienhoven's soldiers. However, the natives understood the political implications of such an act, and responded accordingly. If the Dutch would attempt to forcibly create a tributary empire, utilizing native customs to dominate the area, the Raritans would respond by using a positively European idea of warfare; that is, they tried to wipe away anything having to do with the Dutch on Staten Island. That the Raritan attack seems reminiscent of the massacre of the Pequots by the English is no coincidence. Prior to the Pequot War, tactics such as these were never used by native groups in New Netherland or New England. The rules had changed, and the societies were melding. The Dutch were attempting to operate under native political ideas, and the Algonquins were adapting to European norms, and European symbols to counteract Dutch aims.⁴²

Kieft responded, not by sending another Dutch expedition, but by again using the native tributary system to create a hierarchy of dominance. Some tribes were willing to ally themselves with Kieft, including the Tankiteke band living north and west of Manhattan. The Dutch government was willing to exchange wampum for each head of an enemy tribe brought in, with the price doubled for any members of the attack on Staten Island. By November of 1641, the sachem of the Tankitekes, Pacham, came to New Amsterdam with a number of hands hanging on sticks, with one of them allegedly belonging to the chief Raritan involved in the attack on Staten Island. A number of Long Island tribes also came into the Dutch settlement with evidence that they hunted the Raritans. As Haefeli notes, Pacham had not brought in evidence of dead Raritans for the Dutch bounty, but to "affirm his alliance with the Dutch....The bounty...can easily be

⁴² Haefeli, "Kieft's War and the Cultures of American Violence," 19-20.

seen...as a gift, an essential token of alliance in Native American diplomacy.”⁴³

Eventually, the beleaguered Raritans would seek peace. The tributary empire of the Dutch, like the English to the north, seemed to be falling into place and for a time, peace reigned.

However, unlike with the English after the Pequot War, some of the tribes living in the vicinity of New Amsterdam were still unwilling to live under the thumb of the Dutch. When Kieft and his administration would take a dramatic step to force these remaining tribes into accepting the new patron/client order of affairs in New Netherland, these nations, and others that had previously allied with the Dutch, would respond with more European style warfare to assert their own right to independence.

The conflict rekindled with a seemingly insignificant murder. Claes Swits, an elderly trader living miles north of New Amsterdam on eastern Manhattan, was killed by a young member of the Wecquaesgeek Indians of what is today Westchester County. Kieft, operating as if the natives of the area had accepted Dutch society as dominant, demanded the Wecquaesgeek sachem give up the murderer to be tried in Dutch court. The native leader's response was telling of his ideas on Dutch superiority; he was sad twenty English had not received the same fate, and the “murderer” was avenging the death of his uncle at the hands of Europeans fifteen years prior. This case was far more important than one man's murder. To both Kieft and the Wecquaesgeek sachem, this was an opportunity to assert each culture's method of dealing with violent behavior, and whichever side was allowed to handle this murder would give credence to either Dutch

⁴³ Haefeli, “Kieft's War and the Cultures of American Violence,” 20.

aims at dominance or native attempts to maintain independent political and jurisdictional customs.⁴⁴

Kieft would not allow his fragile empire to be invalidated by the Wecquaesgeeks, so he asked the New Amsterdam council to support an expedition to punish the tribe for its insolence. It took three separate sessions, but finally in January of the following year the members of the council agreed, asking Kieft to command the expedition himself. The Governor, in what most consider an act of complete cowardice, scoffed at the idea, instead sending an ensign with a native guide and eighty men under his command to march north. They came to Wecquaesgeek lands, only to find themselves lost in the unfamiliar woods north of Manhattan, and turned back. Although the Wecquaesgeeks escaped serious danger, tracks discovered close to their settlement frightened them enough to sue for peace. Kieft agreed, on the insistence that the tribe either hand over the killer or inflict punishment on him themselves. Neither course of action was followed.⁴⁵

To Kieft, the inactivity of the Wecquaesgeeks to hold up their end of the peace, combined with another murder committed by the Hackensack tribe at Newark Bay, was a sign that something drastic had to be done to bring the local tribes under Dutch control. It is around this time that the rumors of Miantonomo's "Great Indian Plot" begin to come to the forefront of Kieft's account of the war. He saw the actions of the Hackensacks as an extension of that plot. Then, in February of 1643, less than 6 months after the Hackensack murder, Kieft was given the chance to deal what he thought would be a crippling blow to native designs on independence and intertribal confederation.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Trelease, *Indian Affairs*, 67.

⁴⁵ Haefeli, "Kieft's War and the Cultures of American Violence", 23.

⁴⁶ Haefeli, "Kieft's War and the Cultures of American Violence", 24; *NNN*, 216.

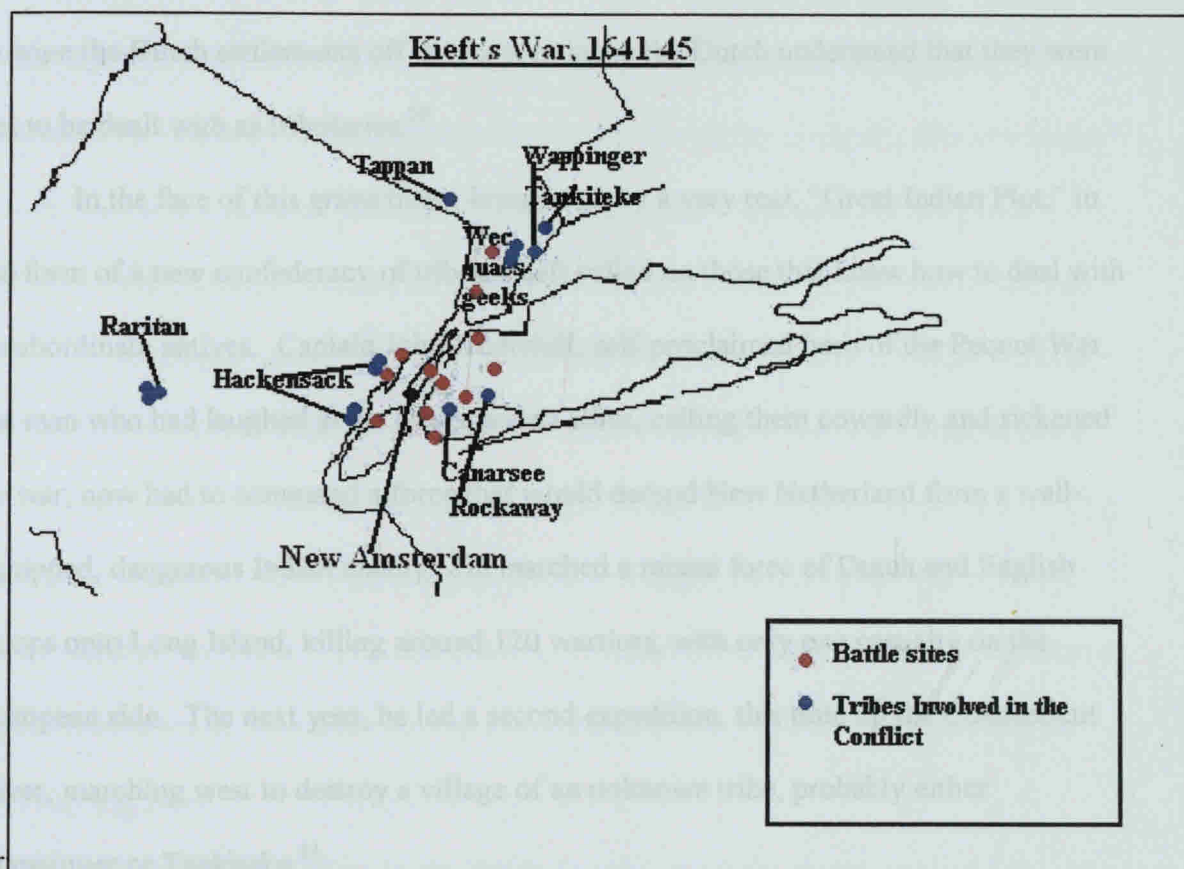
This opportunity would be delivered to the settlers of New Amsterdam through the tributary political machinations surrounding the Mahicans. Attempting to subjugate the same Wecquaesgeeks that harbored the murderer of Claes Swits, they marched down from their territory near Fort Orange with guns bought from the Dutch in the fur trade, and began attacking settlements on the northern Wecquaesgeek frontier. The Wecquaesgeek responded by acting the way any tributary would act when allied with a dominant power under the native system; that is, when faced with danger, they migrated south, seeking refuge with the Dutch. Kieft, however, did not see the Wecquaesgeeks in terms of their obedience to the system, but rather as an example that would force the rest of the local tribes into line. Therefore, Kieft and the main supporters of the war in the New Amsterdam council ordered the destruction of two camps of refugees from the north, one just north of New Amsterdam, the other across the Hudson in the settlement of Pavonia. Hundreds of men, women, and children were massacred. The Wecquaesgeeks thinking the attack was conducted by the Mahicans, retreated closer to New Amsterdam, increasing the slaughter.⁴⁷

That Kieft used the Pequot War as a benchmark of an effective way to subjugate native populations is no secret. His policy of rewarding allied tribes with wampum comes directly from English orders a few years prior, and his tenure in the New World began as the English were destroying the Pequots. Accounts of the war circulated throughout New Netherland, reaching New Amsterdam by way of several Dutch colonial accounts of the conflict, one even written by de Vries. The refugee massacres were more than just revenge for the frontier murders of the previous few years. The Dutch were attempting to wipe the Wecquaesgeeks away like the English had destroyed the Pequots.

⁴⁷ Haefeli, "Kieft's War and the Cultures of American Violence", 26-27; NNN, 227-228.

With an insubordinate tribe killed off through Dutch aggression, the rest of the local Algonquin tribes would be cowed into subjugation.⁴⁸

The massacres at Pavonia and Corlaer's Hook, as they came to be known, far from scaring native tribes into an alliance with the Dutch, created a new confederacy of



those who ordered the massacres had violated their own tributary alliance with the Wecquaesgeeks, and it was time for a new local group to attempt to take the reigns of the Algonquin tribes. The Canarsees, led by a sachem named Penhawitz, incited numerous Long Island bands to assault the Dutch settlements on Western Long Island. The conflict was stopped for a short time during the growing season (May-August) of 1643, as both

⁴⁸ NNN, 203. De Vries supposedly met the natives that killed the English merchant, which in turn began the Pequot War. They were allegedly wearing the trader's clothes and the garments of his shipmates.

sides realized that destruction of corn crops would mean famine and starvation for the entire region. After the short truce, the Wappingers and the once loyal Tankitekes of present-day Westchester joined the Long Island tribes, who still claimed to be at peace with the Dutch, in raiding settlements, killing colonists, and burning buildings.⁴⁹ Once again, the tribes around New Amsterdam resorted to European style total war, attempting to wipe the Dutch settlements off the map, to make the Dutch understand that they were not to be dealt with as tributaries.⁵⁰

In the face of this grave threat brought on by a very real, "Great Indian Plot," in the form of a new confederacy of tribes, Kieft called on those that knew how to deal with insubordinate natives. Captain John Underhill, self-proclaimed hero of the Pequot War, the man who had laughed at his Narragansett allies, calling them cowardly and sickened by war, now had to command a force that would defend New Netherland from a well-equipped, dangerous Indian enemy. He marched a mixed force of Dutch and English troops onto Long Island, killing around 120 warriors, with only one casualty on the European side. The next year, he led a second expedition, this time up the Connecticut River, marching west to destroy a village of an unknown tribe, probably either Wappinger or Tankiteke.⁵¹

⁴⁹ The Long Island tribes claimed that their truce conducted during the Spring of 1643 with the Dutch kept them out of the hostilities, but numerous farms on the Long Island frontier were burned during this new wave of destruction. Lady Deborah Moody, a religious dissenter from New England who had settled at Gravesend in southern Brooklyn, was killed during this phase of the conflict. It is unlikely that native tribes fighting the Dutch would have traveled onto other tribal lands to fight them, since such an act may have brought the Long Island tribes into the war on the side of the Dutch, if they were, as they claimed, at peace with the colonists. Therefore, it is likely that these acts were committed by Long Island tribal warriors, whether they operated within the command structure of the tribes or were simply a few zealous men. For a narrative of the frontier destruction, see Trelease, *Indian Affairs*, 76-77.

⁵⁰ Map information obtained from Trelease, *Indian Affairs*, 6.

⁵¹ Trelease, *Indian Affairs*, 78-79.

As warmer weather approached in 1645, the Long Island tribes, as well as their brethren north of Manhattan, sent envoys to the Dutch. The New Netherlanders, for their part, were well pleased to make peace with the natives, since their farms had been unoccupied for some time.⁵² The native tribes seemed to tire of the constant raids conducted by Underhill, but the envoys also coincide with trade agreements between the Dutch and Mohawks. At this time, the two most powerful entities within New Netherland concluded a pact, and this treaty, under the highly charged political climate, would have sent a message to the local Algonquin tribes. The terms of the peace included reciprocal agreements that both the Dutch and natives would cease hostilities, and carry no weapons around each other's settlements. It seemed as if the partnership that had been in place before the conflicts of 1637-38 and 1641-45 were back in place.⁵³

However, the political landscape of New Netherland would never be the same as it was in the early 1630s. The attempted use of tributary politics by Kieft to secure a tribal empire in the New World had failed in its initial form, but the result of the death of about a thousand natives in the course of the war was a *de facto* tributary state for the remaining groups.

Conclusions: The New, New Netherland

As the dust settled from five years of destructive battles, with scores of Dutch and English killed, and many hundreds of natives wiped away, both sides recognized that they were living in a new colony. Kieft would travel east to face West India Company

⁵² Trelease notes an interesting contradiction that could belie the desperate times that the war caused. In the middle of the worst part of the hostilities in 1643, the town of Hempstead on western Long Island was bought from a number of native bands, including the Massapequa, Merrick, and Rockaway. If no outlying settlements were safe, as De Vries and other chroniclers supposed, why would men and women venture out to the frontier to begin a new town? Hempstead was attacked later that year. *Indian Affairs*, 77.

⁵³ Trelease, *Indian Affairs*, 77-84.

charges, only to be shipwrecked off the coast of Wales during a storm. However, his aims at creating a Dutch tributary empire would in many ways endure for two decades until the English takeover of what then became New York in 1664.

No longer was New Netherland society two separate entities, with the Dutch and native groups only sharing the bonds of trade and geographic proximity. Now the Dutch were in control of the decimated Indian population in and around Manhattan. In the coming decades, the natives would use Dutch courts to settle both intertribal disputes and colonist/native conflict. The Dutch would heavily regulate land transactions, lessening the likelihood of future disputes. Peter Stuyvesant, the next governor, would treat with the natives diplomatically, dissolving a murder by accepting restitution from the wary tribe in the fashion of Algonquin custom.

From the native side, as their land quickly changed hands, they found themselves becoming traders, workers in New Amsterdam, and whalers on Long Island. A few continued to live in the old way, adhering to traditional native culture, but most accepted the jurisdiction of the Dutch and later the English, in turn either becoming useful in the society or moving to areas as yet untouched by white people. The Pequot War and Kieft's War created a situation where being "Indian", in the pre-contact sense was simply untenable.

Tributary politics continued to play a large role in the Eastern Woodland Colonial Society. The Dutch and later the English would move their efforts north, where eventually the Iroquois, the dominant tributary power in the region, would be secured as a powerful tributary against the French in Canada. This tributary relationship, which fully

began after French raids weakened the Iroquois confederacy and drove them into the arms of the waiting English, would stand firm until the Revolutionary War.

The time period between 1637 (the beginning of the Pequot War in New England) and 1645 (the end of Kieft's War in New England), was a watershed era that combined European realization of how the native tributary system was undercutting their imagined dominance of the area with the means to effectively (although, perhaps in the case of the Dutch, not without a little help from their northern brethren) utilize the system to accomplish their goals of subjugation. That the political machinations of the Europeans destroyed traditional native culture and devastated multiple native groups in the area is unquestionable, but so too did it destroy pre-war colonial culture. The result was a polyglot society that, although heavily slanted towards previous European culture, both sides could communicate and dwell within. Kieft may have been a stooge, or a butcher, or a lunatic, but one thing is for certain: His war was not his own.

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